DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 328 851 CG 023 158

AUTHOR	Fennimore, Todd
TITLE	Dropouts: Strategies for Prevention. A National Perspective. Policy Briefs. Number 1.
INSTITUTION	North Central Regional Educational Lab., Elmhurst, IL.
SPONS AGENCY	Office of Educational Research and Improvement (ED), Washington, DC.
PUB DATE	89
CONTRACT	400-86-0004
NOTE	5p.; Contains small type throughout.
PUB TYPE	Viewpoints (Opinion/Position Papers, Essays, etc.) (120)
EDRS PRICE	MF01 Plus Postage. PC Not Available from EDRS.
DESCRIPTORS	*Dropout Prevention; *Dropouts; Educational Policy; Elementary Secondary Education; State Legislation

ABSTRACT

This policy brief looks at the problem of dropouts. The first report, by Todd Fennimore, from the National Center for Research in Vocational Education, provides a national perspective, focusing on dropout incidence and specific factors associated with dropping out of school. Strategies for dropout prevention are presented from both literature reviews and descriptions from dropout prevention programs. Finally, brief recommendations are given for state and district policymakers. A guest commentary by Gary G. Wehlage of the National Center for Effective Secondary Schools suggests a comprehensive approach to dropout prevention that can serve as the foundation for policy initiatives. A section on regional action and agendas lists information on legislation by state for Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Michigan, Minnesota, Ohio, and Wisconsin. References and resources are included. (LLL)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

Policy Briefs

Number 1 • 1989

A Publication of the North Central Regional Educational Laboratory

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

Dropouts: Strategies for Prevention

A National Perspective

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL IN MICROFICHE ONLY HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Marianne Kroeger

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

ED328855

C6023158

Policy Briefs are reports on the status of current issues in education from a national perspective, descriptions of actions and agendas in the NCREL region, commentaries by experts from their particular point of view, and resources for further information.

by Todd Fennimore, NCREL

Distressingly large numbers of youth today are showing signs of alienation and having difficulty making the transition into a productive adult life. Dropping out of school, substance abuse, truancy, depression, delinquency, and teenage pregnancy all are symptoms of the alienation. The nation's leaders, educators, parents, the media, and the business community have expressed great concern about this alienation and its manifestations.

Dropping out is especially problematic because the sectors that once employed dropouts (small farms and smokestack industries) can no longer absorb them. As our economy continues its move from goods production to information processing, more jobs will require higher levels of education. Dropouts will be shut out of tomorrow's high technology workplace and excluded from active participation in a complex democracy as well (U.S. Department of Labor, 1988).

A disproportionate number of those already marginal in our society, the poor and minority, leave school before graduation. School dropout rates for students from poor families are almost twice those reported for the population average (Catterall & Cota-Robles, 1988). Demographic trends indicate the increase of minority populations that have traditionally had high dropout rates (Hodgkinson, 1985).

The factors associated with dropping out include conditions inside and outside of school. Some of the circumstances outside of school include limited English proficiency, substance abuse, early parenting, learning disability, poverty, broken families, low academic expectations of the family and community, and general feelings of exclusion from the school life of high school. Educators have responded to conditions inside and outside of shool by creating strategies that improve the chances that students stay in school.

A content analysis of the dropout prevention literature and descriptions of dropout prevention programs from national, state, and local agencies reveals that educators use any combination of eight strategies when forging a dropout prevention effort (Fennimore, 1988; Hamby, 1989). From a building-level perspective, they include:

- Using non-punitive approaches to attendance monitoring, outreach, and improvement;
- Providing alternative school schedules (e.g., evening high schools, summer programs);
- Modifying or rescinding policies that "push out" students (e.g., grade retention, out-of-school suspension, inadequate social support services);
- Improving the school climate by incorporating elements of school effectiveness and by building partnerships with the community;
- Designing curriculum to link the academic, psychosocial, and vocational domains of adolescent experience;
- Expanding the teacher's role from dispenser of knowledge to mentor, collaborator, and coach;
- Using instructional strategies that actively engage students in learning, such as cooperative or experiential learning or applied problem solving; and
- Assessing the integrity of the school environment by measuring how frequent and how participatory interactions are that are occuring within the school and beyond.

While most traditional dropout prevention efforts are designed as pull-out programs with a narrow focus on basic skills remediation and individualization, some researchers have called for greater emphasis on higher-order thinking and group process skills and more movement toward restructuring schools as a whole, instead of adding programs or alternative schools (Presseisen, 1988; Oakes, 1987).

State-level or district-level policies can encourage or discourage these changes by expanding alternative schools, supporting experimentation with restructured school models, calling for a greater curricular focus on higher-order thinking, and taking a position on tracking. How these issues are addressed frames much of the current debate on dropout prevention.

Leading policymakers recommend that states define "dropout," and build an indicator system that provides common data on all students and holds schools accountable for their dropout rates. To encourage the experimentation required for developing effective restructured or alternative models, state and local policy should allow for more building-level autonomy and support curricular and instructional innovation. Finally, states and districts should encourage districts to develop strong partnerships with the community in forming a dropout prevention effort (Wehlage, 1988). These policies will support schools as they implement dropout prevention strategies. ■

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Regional Action & Agendas

Illinois

Illinois' commitment to reducing the number of school dropouts is reflected in its goal "to adopt, strengthen, and/or expand policies, procedures, and programs which address the problems of at-risk children and youth," and in its funding of special and educational reform programs. These programs include Hispanic Student Dropout Prevention (FY'89 funding level: $360,300); Truants' Alternative and Option Educational Program (FY'89 funding level: $13,073,000); Preschool Education (FY'89 funding level: $23,900,000).

Legislation

No additional legislation is expected.

Future

Depending on available funding, Illinois plans to expand existing programs and practice to include all children at risk of school failure.

Indiana

Beginning with the 1988-89 school year, the legislature appropriated $20 million per year for school-based programs to assist with the educational development of at-risk students. How each school district spends its appropriation is discretionary, providing the program fits into one of the nine categories set by law: preschool, full-day kindergarten, parental and community involvement, transitional programs, tutoring, remediation, expanded school counseling, individualized programs, and model alternative education. Of Indiana's 766 programs, 280 are for counseling, and a large percentage of the others contain some aspect of counseling in conjunction with other programs such as parental and community involvement. By the end of the school year, 211,118 students will have been directly served by the program, and 38 percent of the funding will have been provided by voluntary local contributions. Educational professionals, state legislators, and the Governor will support the program.

Legislation

The original proposal was for $20 million. By the 1990-91 school year, funding is expected to increase by $10-20 million. The Department of Education (DOE) has requested a slight increase in the first year of the next fiscal biennium to evaluate the first year's programs. In the second year, the DOE has requested a $10 million increase.

Future

Bills to establish a commission on drug-free schools, to set a "Just Say No Day," and to create a celebrities task force for drug-free schools are moving rapidly through the legislature.

Iowa

Dropouts are of high interest due to increased dropout rates and new state standards for Local Education Agencies (LEAs), K-14, to develop plans to serve at-risk students. The Alternative Education Association assists LEAs in developing and implementing programs.

Legislation

Under 1984 legislation, districts may file plans for additional allowable growth to provide for returning dropouts and dropout prevention. Effective July 1, 1989, under Iowa's new Educational Standards, programs are to be established to identify and serve at-risk students.

Future

Future objectives are to develop and disseminate a planning format for use in reviewing policies and practices that contribute to student failure and dropout, and to develop program strategies to serve larger geographic areas and include services for small rural districts, including Area Community Colleges and support service agencies.

Michigan

Dropout prevention remains a top priority in Michigan. Initiatives from the Governor's Office, the State Board of Education, and other departments include an emphasis on early childhood education, school improvement and job placement.

Legislation

Funding is currently available for increased Department staffing and pilot projects. Proposed programs would provide local school financial incentives for improving student achievement and attendance including schools of choice as an alternative.

Future

Future plans include funding to integrate the Governor's Human Investment initiatives and enhance the coordination and assessment of employability skills education and job training services.

Minnesota

Because Minnesota has a flexible state funding system that supports a variety of mainstream, postsecondary (while in high school) and alternative programs, categorical and special funding has not been needed for new programs. Current dropout prevention programs are strongly supported by the Governor, Senate, House, Department of Education, and private sector groups.

Current Legislation

- High School Graduation Incentives (HSGI) (1987, amended 1988)
- Adult Diploma Program (1988)
- Area Learning Centers (1987, amended 1988)
- Minor Parent/Pregnant Legislation (1988)
- Mandatory School Attendance for Minor Parents (1987, amended 1988)
- Sliding Scale Child Care Funds (1987)
- Postsecondary Enrollment Options (1985)
- Metro Open Enrollment (1988)
- Other Prevention Laws and Policies including: Early Childhood Screening, AIDS Prevention, and Risk Reduction

Proposed Legislation

- Amendment to HSGI funding to private alternatives
- Interagency Adult Basic Education Initiative
- Amendment to Human Service Welfare Reform for 18- & 19-Year-Olds, Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) custodial parents
- Transportation for children of custodial parents
- Learner outcomes and individualized learning for alternative programs
- Early childhood screening for 3-year-olds

Future

The Legislature and the Governor are directing additional attention to these issues and will be refining dropout program initiatives.

Ohio

Dropout prevention is a major priority of the Ohio Department of Education. *Ohio's Formula for Educational Success*, published by the Department in 1988, defined 14 factors associated with the at-risk student. Pilot projects were selected for 1988-89; 80 state and federally-funded programs were identified to address some of these factors. The goals are to reach at-risk students, keep them in school, and ensure they graduate with skills.

Legislation

The State Board of Education's legislative recommendations included proposals such as full-day kindergarten, adolescent pregnancy programs, urban demonstration projects, additional Reading Recovery Programs, and summer education/job programs so that by the year 2000 all students who enter high school will graduate. Legislative consideration also is being given to driver's license revocation for dropouts.

Future

The Department has established a Dropout Prevention Section within the Educational Services Division to serve as a clearinghouse of information and as a coordinator of Department dropout prevention efforts. Regional and district meetings are planned to gather information and input concerning the dropout problem.

Wisconsin

An aggressive statewide public policy and programmatic thrust is underway focusing on educational standards, school age parents, education for employment, the Job Training Partnership Act, preschool children and education, welfare reform, youth suicide and alcohol and other drug abuse prevention, and pupil services. Constraints include the lack of sufficient resources to implement and integrate programs; limited funding for interagency cooperation; and inflexibility of systems.

Legislation

Legislation is extensive in the areas of:

- Children at risk
- School District Educational Standards
- Compulsory attendance to 18 years
- Truancy Prevention
- Learnfare
- Alcohol and other drug abuse prevention education
- School age parents
- Education for employment

Future

Statutory language affecting children at risk, preschool-12th grade, will be refined and prototypes for effective resource networking and program models will be provided.

Guest Commentary

by Gary G. Wehlage, Associate Director
National Center on Effective Secondary Schools, University of Wisconsin-Madison

As educators began to address the problem of unacceptably high dropout rates during the 1980s, it became clear they were dealing with a complex problem. Practical experience with this problem indicated that there was no single cause or solution. Increasingly state policy initiatives recognized the complexity of the problem by offering legislative programs ranging from pre-school and child care aid to adolescent drug abuse prevention to pilot alternative schools. It appears from the current list of initiatives funded by the states that most of them have approached the problem with a series of discrete programs. These tend to target particular problems associated with dropping out. While each of these discrete programs is probably worthy of support, states and districts should consider how they might best develop comprehensive strategies that more systematically address the factors leading to dropping out. Let me suggest a comprehensive approach to dropout prevention that can serve as the foundation for policy initiatives.

First, dropout prevention might be conceived as requiring a longitudinal plan. Prevention requires a continuous effort from prenatal care and early childhood education through the grades to graduation. An assumption is that one should not expect to "solve" the problem with early intervention strategies alone since many young people become at risk of dropping out from causes that occur later rather than earlier. Also, a comprehensive plan should include dropout retrieval during the high school years and conclude with non-traditional opportunities for acquiring a diploma, GED, and adult basic education.

Second, a comprehensive approach to dropout prevention should be developed from good data about students and the schools they attend. States should consider requiring school districts to use a commonly defined set of indicators for determining the origin and severity of problems associated with dropping out. In conjunction with state mandated definitions and procedures, districts would be required to report information on the following indicators: dropout rate, course failures, retention in grade, suspensions, attendance, academic achievement, teen pregnancy, youth employment, inactivity, and postsecondary enrollment.

These indicators would serve two purposes. First, they would allow states, communities, and school districts to measure change over time on key, commonly defined variables as programs are implemented to improve schools for at-risk youth. These indicators would inform policymakers, educators, and the public as to whether conditions are improving as a result of policy initiatives. Second, data from these indicators would allow schools to assess the extent and severity of certain problems in their schools. Data would provide a basis for making judgments about what interventions and which policy changes are needed. For some schools, information on the various indicators might suggest that relatively minor problems exist, and that with a few improvements schools can provide a safety net of support for those who are at risk of dropping out. This safety net might include a variety of supplementary programs that provide remediation, counseling, and incentives to reach graduation. Where a high dropout rate exists, the indicators might suggest a need to review and modify school policies governing matters such as course failures, retention in grade, and suspension. Also, the data might lead educators to conclude that there is a need for alternatives which offer a substantially different school structure, climate, and curriculum if at-risk students are to succeed in school.

Finally, the indicators can serve to galvanize whole communities that are concerned about the quality of community life and the opportunities that exist for young people. It may be that in some communities young people experience serious social problems and perceive little opportunity for a better life. In such situations, schools need to unite with other community institutions to provide services and create a climate of hope about the future that makes engagement in school seem worthwhile. State policy could encourage the formation of community collaboratives that bring together the schools, social service agencies, the business community, private organizations such as churches and service clubs, the legal system, the city council, and institutions of higher education. Collaboratives provide the basis for community planning and coordination of resources in attacking the broad array of conditions that place young people at risk. ■

References & Resources

References

Catterall, J., & Cota-Robles, E. (1988, November). The educationally at-risk: What the numbers mean. Paper presented at an invitational conference at Stanford University, Accelerating the education of at risk students. Stanford, CA.

Clune, W.H., P., & Patterson, J. (1989, February). The implementation and effects of high school graduation requirements: First steps toward curricular reform. New Brunswick, NJ: Center for Policy Research in Education.

Fennimore, T.F. (1988). A guide for dropout prevention: Creating an integrated learning environment in secondary schools. Columbus, OH: National Center for Research in Vocational Education.

Hamby, J.V. (1989, February). How to get an "A" in your dropout prevention report card. Educational Leadership, 46 (5), 21-28.

Hodgkinson, H.L. (1985). All one system: Demographics of education, kindergarten through graduate school. Washington, DC: Institute for Educational Leadership, Inc.

Oakes, J. (1987, October). Improving inner-city schools: Current directions in urban district reform (Report No. JNE-02). Santa Monica, CA: Center for Policy Research in Education.

Presseisen, B.Z. (Ed.). (1988). At-risk students and thinking: Perspectives from research. Washington, DC: Joint publication of the National Education Association and Research for Better Schools, Inc.

U.S. Department of Labor. (1988). Workforce 2000: Work and workers for the 21st century. Washington, DC: Author.

Wehlage, G. (1988). School reforms for at-risk students. Madison, WI: National Center on Effective Secondary Schools, University of Wisconsin-Madison.

Williams, P.A. (1987, October). Standardizing school dropout measures. Brunswick, NJ: Center for Policy Research in Education.

Resources

Illinois

Please contact the Illinois State Board of Education for available products.

Indiana

Please contact the Indiana Department of Education for available products.

Iowa

Iowa Department of Education:
"Iowa Guidance Surveys"
"Alternative Schools and Programs - Reaching Out to Help People"
"Student at Risk - A Planning Worksheet for Educators"

Michigan

Michigan Department of Education:
Report on Operation Graduation: A School Dropout Prevention Program(1989)
The Black Child in Crisis, Identification of At-risk Students (1988)
Michigan School Dropouts
Hispanic Dropout Report (1985)

Minnesota

Minnesota Department of Education:
Copies of legislation
Mailings on each program
Flyers on High School Graduation Incentives, Area Learning Centers, Minor Parent/Pregnant Minors, and Post-Secondary Enrollment Options
Learners at Risk legislation in Minnesota
Listing of child care centers and referral in high schools in Minnesota

Ohio

Ohio Department of Education:
Reducing Dropouts in Ohio Schools: Guidelines and Promising Practices (1984)
Ohio's Formula for Educational Success (1988)
Fourth Annual Report - Indicators for Progress (1988)
Identifying Barriers to Serving At-Risk Students (1988)

Wisconsin

Department of Public Instruction
Children At Risk, Guidance, JTPA, Alcohol and Other Drug Abuse Prevention, Pupil Services, Education for Employment Resource & Planning Guides
Department of Industry, Labor, & Human Relations: JTPA and Employability Resource Guides
Department of Health and Social Services: Learnfare and Workfare Resource Guides

State Contacts

Illinois

Illinois State Board of Education
100 North First Street
Springfield, Illinois 62777
Carolyn Farrar
217-782-6035

Indiana

Indiana Department of Education
State House, Rm. 229
Indianapolis, Indiana 46204-2798
Carol D'Amico
317-232-6667

Iowa

Iowa Department of Education
Grimes State Office Building
Des Moines, Iowa 50319
Raymond Morley
515-281-8582 or
Edward Ranney
515-281-3893

Michigan

Michigan Department of Education
P.O. Box 30008
Lansing,Michigan 48909
Linda Forward
517-335-0554

Minnesota

Minnesota Department of Education
682 Capitol Square Building
550 Cedar Street
St. Paul, Minnesota 55101
Joleen Durken
612-296-4080
Hot Line number for dropout information: 612-296-1261

Ohio

Ohio Department of Education
65 South Front Street
Columbus, Ohio 43266-0308
Margaret Trent
614-466-4838

Wisconsin

Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction
125 S. Webster
P.O. Box 7841
Madison, Wisconsin 53707
Dennis Van Den Heuvel
608-266-1723

Opinions expressed in the commentaries do not necessarily reflect the views of the NCREL staff or Board.
Facts and ideas presented in NCREL's Policy Briefs are intended to survey a current issue and not to advocate a particular position.

Policy Briefs
A publication of the North Central Regional Educational Laboratory
295 Emroy
Elmhurst, Illinois 60126

Telephone 312-941-7677
Source #BBS0893
Fax 312-941-7163

Jeri Nowakowski, *Interim Executive Director*
Nancy Fulford, *Editor*
Marianne Krueger, *Production Editor*

This publication is based on work sponsored wholly or in part by the Office of Educational Research and Improvement (OERI), Department of Education, under Contract Number 400-86-0004. The content of this publication does not necessarily reflect the views of OERI, the Department of Education, or any other agency in the U.S. Government.

Designed and produced on the desktop by Peter D. Reid Design

Bulk Rate U.S.
Postage PAID
Elmhurst, Illinois
Permit No. 338

BEST COPY AVAILABLE